

SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN L. DAWSON,

OF PENNSYLVANIA,

ON

THE HOMESTEAD BILL.

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DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON TUESDAY,  
JANUARY 9, 1855.

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WASHINGTON:  
PRINTED BY A. O. P. NICHOLSON.  
1855.

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## SPEECH.

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The House having under consideration the pending amendment to the graduation bill, granting one hundred and sixty acres of land to actual settlers—

Mr. DAWSON addressed the House as follows :

Mr. SPEAKER: Twice before the present occasion it has been my fortune, in a somewhat prominent sense, to be the advocate before you of the great subject to which I have again to ask your attention. The thanks of the country are eminently due to this honorable body for the reception hitherto bestowed upon this measure, and the warm support which has here been extended to it. I am well aware that the signal favor which the homestead has met at your hands is in no degree owing to any merit in the advocacy of the bill, but solely to its own intrinsic excellence. It is yet appropriate to remark upon the ability and eloquence which the measure has heretofore elicited in its support from members of this House, by which its advantages have been illustrated to the mind of the country; and to hope that the same ardor and unanimity of sentiment which characterized your former action in regard to this subject, will be now once more manifested in its favor.

It will be recollected, Mr. Speaker, that, at the last session of Congress, the bill commonly known as the homestead bill was sent to the Senate, sanctioned by the overwhelming decision of this House, and that the Senate, avoiding a direct vote on its provisions, adopted, in lieu of it, the substitute of Mr. HUNTER. To that substitute there are many and grave objections, and it is now my purpose to seek a re-establishment, with a few alterations, of the original bill. An examination of the Senate's substitute shows it to be a measure for the benefit of States, railroads, and speculators. Its adoption would be disastrous to the purity of legislation in the land States. Who does not know what a scramble would ensue in these States, amongst incorporated companies, to get possession of the lands of which that which has been carried on in Congress would be but a magnified reflection? Who does not see the innumerable charters which, under the influence of log-rolling in the legislatures, would be brought forth to absurd for railroad purposes all the lands in these States, to the utter exclusion of the settler; which would cause immense quantities of bonds to be spawned over the country, make the competition for money unparalleled, and increase the rates of interest to an unprecedented extent. The starting of so many immature and impracticable schemes, by creating a fictitious demand for labor and the necessities of life, would be most pernicious in its influence. Little by little the gigantic bubble would con-



tinue to swell and glisten until it should burst, and bankruptcy, in its most stupendous form, be the sequel. This is no picture of fancy, but one with which the American public are in fact unfortunately too familiar.

The provision of the substitute which professes to ingraft the homestead principle, viz: the eighth section, is a mockery. It apparently allows every head of a family, or male person of the age of twenty-one years, to enter a quarter-section of unappropriated public lands, upon the condition of payment according to a graduated scale of twenty-five cents per acre. But whether the settler shall be able to take any advantage at all of this provision, depends upon the adoption, or otherwise, by the States, of this provision of the Senate's substitute; since the States have the privilege, under another section, of acquiring the absolute right to the public lands within their limits; and of disposing of them, and at such higher prices as their wisdom shall direct, thus superseding the claim of the settler entirely. It is, at all events, manifest, that this graduation feature is one for the benefit of capitalists. Its effect will be to pass into the hands of such men millions of acres which will remain in a wilderness condition, it may be, for centuries, thus defeating the settlement of the country, and tending to build up a landed aristocracy. It is in direct antagonism to the policy of Mr. Jefferson, of destroying the rights of primogeniture and entail, and the removal of all unjust restrictions which tend to tie up property beyond the reach of the cultivator. It will be an approximation, so far as the different genius of the two governments will allow, of the policy of the British government, which has at length concentrated in the hands of some thirty thousand individuals, all the landed property of the kingdom.

The reason for the policy of graduating and reducing the price of the public lands was in order that, by promoting large sales, the government might be better enabled to discharge the public debt; but with the extinguishment of all the old debt, an inconsiderable existing debt and an overflowing treasury, this reason has ceased. There being now no need of revenue from the lands, there should be a reversal of this policy, and the lands so disposed of as best to promote settlement, and thus subserve the general interests of the country. The revenue from the customs is already more than sufficient to support the government; and perhaps the greatest evils of our present political condition are those resulting from the struggles to get possession of the surplus of the treasury. The true policy of the country is a poor treasury and a rich people.

I feel, Mr. Speaker, in once more approaching this question, that we have already exhausted upon it the resources of argument. I propose, at this time, only a few remarks, such as seem warranted by a review of the whole question, by the light of the recent searching discussion which it has undergone in the coördinate branch of the national legislature. So far from sinking, in any degree, under the weight of that discussion, I trust it is now apparent that at no time has this measure occupied a stronger position before the country than at present. A combination of untoward circumstances, quite unconnected with the merits of the homestead, have, for a time, interfered to prevent its passage by the Senate; but the "still small voice" of the people, speaking in the calm majesty of might and justice, is already rising above the jar of sectional and partisan interests, and insisting upon the adoption into the



legal policy of the country of this, their favorite measure. Once more let us discharge our duty towards it. Let us calmly place before our fellow-citizens the grounds upon which rest the justice and policy of the homestead, and give it the sanction of our decided approval; and we can afford to wait the subsidence of these elements of opposition, which, varied and conflicting in their nature, are destined to a brief duration. A persevering, earnest, and steady support, is what the country looks for at our hands—is what she has a right to expect—and will finally enable us to prevail.

It may be thought, indeed, by some, that the passage, at the late session, of the land graduation bill, has taken away much pretext for the further pressure of the homestead, and has accomplished all that could be desired or hoped for by the friends of that measure. Surely, nothing can be further from the truth. It may be admitted, indeed, that the enactment of that bill was advancing a step in the right direction; but how limited the benefits it confers in comparison with those sought by the measure under consideration. It is seen at once that, except as regards lands which have been ten years in market, the old land system remains unchanged by the graduation bill—a feature which renders it inapplicable to much of the land in the land States, and entirely so to that of the Territories. It is seen further, that as regards that class of lands which has been ten years in market, the reduction is only twenty-five cents an acre—a reduction which, as regards the class of settlers sought to be benefited by the provisions of the homestead, is quite too insignificant to be appreciated. The further reductions to seventy-five, fifty, twenty-five, and twelve and a-half cents an acre—according as the lands have been fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, and thirty years in market—are still liable to the same objection. It is only when the lands have been thirty years subject to private entry, and, in consequence, are reduced to the *minimum* rate provided by the graduation bill, that the benefit becomes appreciable for that large class of settlers for whom the homestead bill was intended chiefly to provide. The conditions, however, under which the public lands become reduced to the lowest rates, are such as to limit it to the smallest and most worthless portions of the lands in the States, and in the Territories it can have no application at all, and that, therefore, the great objects sought by the homestead remain still to be accomplished.

Let us proceed, however, to notice the few objections which, in the scrutinizing analysis which the subject has recently undergone in the other wing of the Capitol, senators have thought proper to insist upon against the principles of the homestead bill. Thus, it has been contended by certain senators of the old States that the public lands not acquired since the deeds of cession cannot be disposed of, except in accordance with the conditions of these instruments; and that, as regards subsequent acquisitions, the distinction proposed by this bill would be unequal, and therefore unjust. It can be successfully shown, however, as regards the first branch of this proposition, that, in order to comply with that requirement of the deeds of cession, that the lands ceded should be regarded as “a common fund for the use and benefit of such of the United States as have become, or shall become, members of the confederation or federal alliance of the United States, according to their



usual proportions in the general charge and expenditure," that it is necessary to have reference to the conditions imposed by the eighth article of the constitution of the confederation, namely: that the proceeds from these lands "should be paid into the national treasury according to the amount of real estate held in private hands in each State; and if any portion remain unexpended, that it shall be paid back, in the same proportion, to the States from which collected," and not distributed through the treasury for general purposes.

Such was the rule under the confederation, but it is evident that under the present constitution it is wholly inapplicable, and impossible to be carried into effect. The revenue of the country, whether collected from the customs or the sale of the public lands, is paid into the national treasury, without any reference to the rule embodied in the deeds of cession, and is applied for the "general welfare" under the limitations imposed by the constitution of 1789, and without any reference to the eighth article of that of the confederation. It is no longer possible to ascertain the proportion of each State in the "general charge and expenditure"—that phrase having relation to a *status* which has been wholly changed by the new constitution—and no longer possible in the same way to pay back to the several States, parties to the "federal alliance," the surplus over the expenditures fixed by Congress.

It can be maintained, on the other hand, with irresistible strength of argument, that the States which were parties to the deeds of cession were also parties to the constitution of 1789—an article of which confers the amplest powers of disposal of the public lands, which the passage of the homestead calls for. So incontrovertible is this fact, and so complete is the abrogation by the present constitution of all conditions precedent in the deeds of cession, that it can hardly again be drawn into question.

As to the principles of the homestead being unjust to the old States, as regards the territory acquired since the deeds of cession, the objection will scarcely be deemed tenable—the subsequent acquisitions having been made subject to all the conditions and limitations of the constitution, and falling, therefore, under the same rule of distribution. Besides, it is to be remembered, that the old States have originally received grants of the lands within their limits, and have since converted and applied the proceeds. They have been also, and still continue, the objects of government bounty in other ways. Have not liberal appropriations been made, from time to time, for the improvement of rivers and harbors in the old States? Has not the public money been expended there profusely for the construction of light-houses, coast defences, and public edifices? And have they not been the greatest sharers in all the great measures of legislation which mark the history of the country? If we speak only of the States of New England, and the sugar-growing States of the South, have they not been the greatest gainers by the system of high duties? But it is impossible, by the same act of legislation, to benefit, in the same degree, a new country in the wilderness and States which have a dense population, with few unoccupied lands. It is, however, sufficient to prove the impartial and paternal character of the government, if all interests are duly remembered and benefited in turn.

But again, when we speak of benefiting the old States, surely we mean the *people* of those States, and not anything whatever of an inan-



imate nature, whether mountain or plain, field or forest, town or country. If so, the homestead is a measure in which the people of the old States will participate the most largely, because they have the largest number within their limits who can take advantage of its provisions. I know indeed that this very circumstance is made an objection to the homestead, because it is pronounced a temptation, an inducement, to a large class of the people of the old States to settle on the public domain.

But, if it be true that portions of the valuable citizens, whether native or foreign, of the old States, shall feel inducements presented them by this bill to emigration, is it any reason for withholding such inducements, that the landholders of New England, New York, and Pennsylvania, would thereby be deprived, to some extent, of their tenants, or that the demand for farms might be somewhat less active? Have the rights of labor no claims to recognition on the part of the National Legislature, except as secondary and subsidiary to those of landholders? Sir, I am free to confess that my reflections upon this subject have led me to very different conclusions. I am of opinion that government, then, best discharges its multifarious and responsible duties, as far as practicable and legitimate, within the scope of its powers, by advancing every interest under its control. Sir, I feel convinced that no such remnant of feudal bondage, no such slavish doctrine as would tie the tenant to the soil of his employer, will ever find sanction in the free hearts of this land. Our ancestors had done with all that centuries ago, in the mother country, when, from the reign of Edward I, through that of Henry VII, and in that of Charles I, they finally succeeded in extinguishing the tenure of *villenage*, and converted all lands in the Kingdom into free and common socage. The legal systems of these States recognise nothing else. Our theory of social rights, embodied in that immortal preamble of Jefferson, recognises nothing else.

The assumption, however, that the passage of this bill would, for a time, operate unequally towards the old States by reducing the price of property there, is not well founded. Surely such a consequence would not be more likely to follow this measure than it would the preëmption system. Whatever irregularity might be the result of the introduction of the new policy, I believe it would be of brief duration, and quite inappreciable. Such are the energies of industry—such the stimulus of free institutions, that no field of enterprise will long remain unoccupied. The flood of prosperity which is continually rolling over the land, like water, is ever tending to a uniform level.

But to dispel the apprehensions of gentlemen, let us refer to the reality of things as exhibited by the experience of the country for the last seven years. A period of unprecedented prosperity in the departments of commerce, agriculture, and internal improvements—in which so many avenues of intercourse have been constructed between the seaboard and the valleys of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence; and in which more than one hundred and forty-five millions of acres of the public lands have been disposed of, a good portion of which has been reduced under cultivation—there never was a period in which the prices of produce and real estate in the old States have been better maintained. Thus, notwithstanding the vast amount of the products of the interior which have been brought into competition with those of



the old States, and notwithstanding the mighty stream of emigration to the West, by which their population has been annually carried off, the effect upon prices has not only been wholly unfelt, but the latter have even continued to advance.

A kindred objection to the last, is that which represents the free grants proposed by this bill as doing injustice to those who have heretofore purchased of government, at \$2 and \$1 25 per acre. Here you make a distinction, it is said, which works injustice to former purchasers. But you made the same distinction, and created an inequality which worked the same injustice, when you reduced the price of the lands from \$2 to \$1 25 per acre; and still later, when, at the last session, you passed the land graduation bill. By this argument, whatever policy in regard to our land system we may first, by accident, have stumbled upon, that, with unchangeable tenacity, should be maintained. Such an argument is of no avail. You cannot tie up the hands of your successors in legislation; and the policy which is good for one generation may be totally unadapted to the next. "*Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis.*" The times change, and we with them. Doubtless, the feudal system, in the warlike times in which it flourished, in the middle ages, was a wise and useful institution. So, in the condition of things existing in Europe, a monarchy in some form may be the best government for any given nation; though the progress of ideas, and of social amelioration, may in the next age find it obsolete and *functus officio*. Sir, it is one thing to require a price for your domain, when the country is in need of a revenue, and another and quite different one to give it free to actual settlers, when it is no longer needed for revenue, and in order to carry out a great scheme of policy not less favorable to individuals than to all the great interests of the country—a policy which, more than any other, will offer its appropriate inducements to labor; will build up into organized societies the untenanted wilderness, and people the solitary leagues of fertile soil which stretch away from the confines of the States to the Western ocean.

It was insisted with much earnestness by a distinguished Senator from Delaware, [Mr. CLAYTON,] that this is a partial measure; that it is class legislation; that all men cannot turn farmers; and that, therefore, in order to equalize your bounty, you should grant money to those who cannot use land. But, tried by the test, it may safely be said, that never has a law of a beneficial character obtained a place upon your statute-book, but what the interests for which it provided have been partial and limited. If this is a true objection, let me ask once more, does it not lie just as strongly against the preëmption system? Does it not lie just as strongly against a bill for the benefit of manufacturers?—for the benefit of soldiers and marines?—or for a bill raising the salaries of judges? If a man desires the special benefits of this legislation, let him bring himself within the class upon which the bounty is conferred. Let him fight the battles of his country; let him engage in the working of metals or the spinning of cotton; in the culture of cane and the boiling of sugar; or let him become a dignitary of the bench, and he will share directly in the benefits of the legislation, if it be special. These are all staple interests of the country, and it is competent for all to engage in them without let or hindrance. Who



ever thought of making it an objection to the law allowing land bounty to the widows of soldiers, that unmarried women could receive no benefit therefrom? Who ever objected to the imposition of a forty per centum duty upon iron, that it did not benefit the boiler of salt? Or, who ever considered it doing injustice to the rest of the community that you appropriate money for the construction of marine hospitals, open only to seamen or boatmen?

Sir, the objection that the homestead will not directly benefit every class of industry in the country, and in equal degree, is of a kind similar to that in the instances just mentioned; and it is equally futile in all. Every man, whether rich or poor, has the power or privilege, if his circumstances will permit him—of which, as in other cases, he is left to be the judge—of becoming an actual settler on the public domain, and thus participating directly in the benefits conferred by this bill. We claim it, however, as a most positive and favorable distinction of this measure—which regards the cultivation of new soil, and bringing under civilizing influences new territory—that it does benefit, not the less surely and decidedly, because indirectly, the great interests of manufactures and commerce, and in a higher degree than any other special measure whatever.

Another ground of opposition, much insisted on by distinguished Senators, is the favor shown by the bill to American residents of foreign birth. But what is the condition of things under the existing system? Foreigners, not even citizens, are allowed to settle on the public lands under the pre-emption laws of 1830 and 1841, and it has been deemed sufficient if they have become citizens at the reception of the patent for their locations. And by the very liberal provisions of the graduation bill passed at the last session, and approved August 4, 1854, “any person” can enter as an occupant, and settle upon the lands, and acquire a title and patent at the graduated and reduced rates. Upon what reasons of policy, of justice, of humanity, should more rigorous conditions be imposed upon any of the objects upon whom the provisions of this bill will operate? Is it proposed to exclude foreigners altogether? Then you must repeal the naturalization laws, and adopt a policy worthy of ancient Egypt, or modern Japan. But let us be careful, in doing so, that we belie not the great principles which lie at the basis of our government, and that we prove not ungrateful to the memories of our fathers, and to those noble and self-sacrificing spirits who were prodigal alike of their money and their blood, throughout the two wars which secured us in the establishment of our independence; and to the thousands who since have come to cast their lots with ours, incorporating themselves with us, becoming assimilated to our institutions and usages, and infusing an element of incalculable strength into our republican system.

I believe, sir, that it is a futile notion that, by any policy short of a repeal of the naturalization laws, and perhaps even a prohibition to the exile of a “home and a country,” you will be able to stop the influx of foreigners. The premium held out by our republican institutions will attract crowds, till the population of the continents shall at last be equalized. You cannot stay this resistless wave of immigration. The over-crowded districts of the Old World will heave it upward and



onward, and it must struggle for a subsistence and a home. It is, then, far more philosophical to seek such a disposition of it as, from a source of mischievous irritation, shall convert it into one of profit to the State; and, while assimilating it to our institutions, shall make it tributary to the general prosperity.

It has, again, suited the purposes of the opponents of the bill to view it as designed to offer bounties to interfere with the natural course of industry, converting the followers of commercial pursuits and mechanics into farmers; and great evils have been predicted to follow from this disruption of old pursuits. The farmer, it is said, will not only have his land cheapened in the old States, by the withdrawal of population, but the price of produce will be reduced by the competition of the number of those who have turned farmers. In this anticipation, however, no account is taken of the overstocking of trades, professions, and business pursuits, and by the numbers which the advance of each fresh generation is annually pouring in their ranks. Poverty and want are the inevitable result to large numbers. By this bill, we only provide a refuge for this surplus, where by the "sweat of the brow" they may, at least, obtain a livelihood; for agriculture, as a pursuit, has this favorable peculiarity, that it enables its followers to obtain the means of living, if it does not furnish them with any great surplus for exchange. While, in other callings, the ability of an individual to sustain himself depends upon the quantity of his peculiar products which may be wanted by others, the agriculturist can live in a great measure on what he produces. Sir, if the prosperity of the old States depends upon a large surplus of poor population, so that labor shall be cheap and abundant, and if we are called upon to sustain this prosperity by so shaping our legislation as that the masses shall be kept ground down to the earth, I, for one, shall ever protest against the wrong. I prefer, rather, a policy in accordance with the noble sentiment of the poet; "*Fiat justitia ruat cælum.*" Let justice be done, though the heavens fall.

But the argument against the bill on the ground of injury to the old States, in the several phases in which we have considered it, is not borne out by the facts. It is shown, incontrovertibly, by statistics, that while the western States have been forming, the progress of the old States in wealth and population has been proportionate. An examination of the facts thus collected, discloses the interesting truth, that while in the last ten years the old States have advanced in population one hundred per centum faster than the most flourishing of the European States, the land States have, at the same time, received from them more than one-fourth of their whole population. There is, in truth, no antagonism; and it is in vain that the opponents of the measure would attempt to create any. A benefit conferred upon one State is quickly diffused among all—thus resembling mercy in the quality ascribed to it by the great dramatist.

A Senator from Delaware, [Mr. BAYARD,] distinguished alike for his learning and legal acumen, has been pleased to term the measure "an illusion;" mark the words, sir, "an illusion"—there is nothing in it, he says, "it is all an illusion." I have no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that to the Jacobites of the seventeenth century, the abdication of James the I, and the accession of William of Orange, seemed at first "an illusion." But the succession of one line of the Stuarts was then broken, and the



House of Hanover is still upon the throne of England. No doubt, when it was first urged, the claim of the Americans to the right of taxing themselves seemed to the whole people of England an "illusion," as did the plan of independence to the royalists in the Revolution; but this right has lately received a formal acknowledgment by the House of Lords with reference to Canada, and our independence has long been firmly established. Later still, the project of Catholic emancipation was, for years, deemed by Lord Eldon, and other tory leaders in the Lords, as an "illusion;" but the Catholic relief bill is upon the statute-book as a law of the British realm. Illusions, too, were regarded, no doubt, the projects for reform in the English system of representation and the corn laws; yet everything necessary for the security of popular rights, in regard to these subjects, has been yielded to the perseverance of the people, supported by a great and just cause.

A distinguished Senator from Pennsylvania, [Mr. BRODHEAD,] has been pleased to plant himself in decided opposition to the measure upon the ground of constitutional difficulties, and upon a variety of other grounds, which he rather touches upon than develops. My answer to the Senator's speech shall be brief and to the point.

On the constitutional topic, I will, in the first place, cite the third section of the fourth article: "Congress shall have the power to *dispose of*, and make all needful rules and regulations respecting, the territory and other property of the United States." I will next refer to the practice of the government under this provision, and will point to the incorporation of the homestead principle in the bills for the organization of the Territories of Oregon and New Mexico. In illustration of the exercise by Congress of the general right to dispose of the public lands, I would instance, also, the grants to railroads and for school purposes, for the construction of canals, the improvement of navigable streams, and internal improvements, &c., which, in the aggregate, are found to have amounted, on the 30th September, 1854, to more than one hundred and fifty millions of acres.

I would next instance, in support of the same power, the opinions of the most eminent for ability and patriotism, and the most popular of our statesmen, living and departed. I would mention, as names which have sustained the theory and approved the practice, those of Jefferson, who proposed the settlement of a portion of the Louisiana purchase west of the Mississippi, by conditional grants of one hundred and sixty acres of land—of Monroe and his Cabinet, of whom were Calhoun and Crawford, who, in 1819, approved the grant to the Connecticut asylum, of lands in Kentucky; and that of James K. Polk, who approved the incorporation of the homestead principle directly in the act erecting the Territory of Oregon. I would refer, for the same purpose, to that of Franklin Pierce, in his approval of an act passed at the last session of Congress, making gratuitous grants of lands to actual settlers in the Territory of New Mexico. I would also refer to the grant made to Isaac Zane, during the administration of Washington, of three tracts of land, for blazing a bridge-path from Wheeling to Maysville, Kentucky; to the Florida settlement law, granting a quarter-section of land on condition of occupancy for the term of three years; to the law of 1791, by which grants of land were made to settlers at Vincen-



nes ; to the act of 1792, by which grants were made to the Ohio company for actual settlers ; and to the law of 1795, making a similar provision for settlers at Gallipolis. The principle has had the judgment and sanction of Jackson and Webster—names above suspicion for ability and patriotism—and is sustained by the highest authority of our living patriots and statesmen. The constitutional right of Congress to dispose of the lands in such way as their judgment may approve, is in clear and explicit language ; and in the face of the unlimited exercise of the power, from the foundation of the government to the present time, there is no man who can wink so fast that he cannot see it.

It has been remarked that none but “ drunkards and loafers ” will take advantage of this bill ; that its benefits will inure almost exclusively to that class of our citizens. And is it to terms like these, stigmatizing as criminal and subjecting to ridicule the misfortunes of a portion of our countrymen, that we are called upon to listen as to overwhelming arguments against the policy of this measure ? Abusive and depreciating epithets are cheap, and ask not the aid of talents to give them point and effect. Their employment, on the contrary, argues the want of better capital for the service. The same style of argument was employed against the principle of free government, the great principle of political and civil equality as proclaimed by Jefferson ; and even the benign religion of Christianity was derided in the persons of the humble fishermen who were its first propagators.

The class of men for whom this bill is intended to provide are not “ drunkards and loafers.” They are the same class who, under Washington, in 1776, erected the batteries upon the heights of Dorchester, and entered the town of Boston as General Howe withdrew. They are the same who, in the trying march from field to field, never lost a spark of their patriotic devotion, but, in the hour of disaster, like their gallant leader, still cast their eyes to the mountains as the *dernier resort* and final refuge of their liberties. With Washington they fought bravely at Brandywine and Valley Forge, and witnessed, with him, the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown—the closing scene of the Revolution. They are the same class who, afterwards, in the struggle which began in 1812, in which the young America was again called upon to contend with the power of England for the freedom of the seas, were found by the side of Jackson, at New Orleans, braving, with dauntless breasts, the British bullets and bayonets, and sending up the victorious shout from under that glorious banner which they had borne to immortal triumph. They are the same who, with General Taylor, gathered unfading laurels upon the deadly field of Buena Vista ; who landed with Scott at Vera Cruz, and accompanied him in his heroic march through the valley of Mexico to the gates of the city ; and they are the same who, under its beetling walls, having extinguished, by sure aim, the lights upon the ramparts, fought afterwards through the gloom and confusion of night, and until the broad splendors of the meridian sun shone upon their flag of victory waving over the Plaza. They are not “ drunkards and loafers,” but of that class who, in time of peace, turn the furrow and gather the harvest, and who constitute the bone and sinew of the land from Maine to Texas. They are the men who repel savage violence from the frontiers, who fell the forests, and who are everywhere



the chief producers of the substantial wealth of the country. They are of that class who swing the hammer and drive the plane; who plan and who build; and who are found at the awl and the last, at the printing-press and the loom; of that class which tend the locomotive and guide the steamer; which constitute our mercantile marine; and which fill every class of industrial pursuits. It is the class which has produced Franklin, and Rittenhouse, and Godfrey, and Fulton, and Morse. I may go a step further, and say it is the class which produced Powers, and Cleavenger, and Greenough, and Crawford, and Mills, who, as with the chisel of Praxatiles, could almost make the marble speak; and West, who, as with the pencil of Raphael, could almost "make the brook murmur down the painted landscape."

But, to take leave of the objections, and the ingenious gentlemen who urge them, let us pass, for a moment, to the merits of the bill. It strikes me, Mr. Speaker, that the proper point from which to survey this subject, is that which enables us to contemplate it as a great question of policy for the settlement of the public lands, and their removal from the halls of legislation. The unwieldiness and expense of the present system, and the degree to which it monopolizes and embarrasses congressional action, are potent reasons for a change. That a change must be made at no distant day, there can be no doubt; for these evils are increasing with each recurring year. In the new disposition which is to be made of this public property, I desire that, first and foremost, the actual settler should be remembered. Nor is it just that you should regard the disposition by this bill as a gift. It is right, rather, to consider, in addition to the consideration of fourteen and one-half cents per acre, which obviates any fancied constitutional scruples, and covers the original cost of purchase, and the extinguishment of the Indian title, the five years' occupation and cultivation as an ample compensation, as far better fulfilling the great object of disposing of the public lands, namely—of settlement, and the development of their resources—than the present system of selling at \$1 25 per acre, to persons who buy with no intention of ever occupying the lands themselves, but solely to profit by the rise in value consequent upon the improvement of the neighboring lands by the labors of the actual settler.

In great questions of policy, it has been well said, other elements are properly to be considered, besides those of revenue; and a greater addition is thus made to the positive wealth of the country, and to her means of defence, than it is possible to procure by means of revenue arising from the sale of the lands.

We find, in referring to the history of that country from which we derive our representative system, and the doctrines of the common law, that the tendency of the best minds of the century that has just passed, was to the conclusion, as a distinct principle, that government lands are most wisely administered in private hands. This principle has received emphatic recognition from one of her wisest statesmen. It was Edmund Burke, who, in the English Parliament, more than seventy years ago, in advocating a policy, in its important aspects similar to that now proposed, uttered that remarkable declaration in regard to the alienation of the Crown lands of Great Britain, that "they should be thrown into the mass of



private property, by which they will come, through the course of circulation, and through the political secretions, into well regulated revenue."

Once more let us revert briefly to the origin and progress of the principle of free grants, in consideration of settlement, which we now propose to erect into greater prominence in our land policy. In a speech which I had the honor to make before you at the recent session in advocacy of this measure, I was at pains to collect from our colonial history many striking instances in which, for the express purpose of settlement, extensive tracts of territory—portions of these now populous and flourishing States—were granted to one or a few individuals by governments much less favorable to individual rights than our own. The grants now proposed, though small in amount, are, in part, for the same recognised purpose; and, while the land subject is thereby disposed of in this respect, the measure has this incidental recommendation: that it is chiefly the laboring class of our people—those for whom no direct legislation has ever been had hitherto—who will receive the first benefit of the measure. We may remember that it has been often urged as an argument for a high protective policy, and for a United States Bank, that those measures would "better enable the rich to take care of the poor." But if government action may be invoked to favor directly the interests of a class who are capitalists and proprietors, in order that a benefit may flow indirectly to labor, what is there in reason to prevent us from conferring the same benefit more surely and directly? But the bill creates no odious or unjust distinction; and the wealthiest citizen, alike with the poorest, becomes entitled to the same privileges upon the conditions of settlement and cultivation.

Possessing, as this measure does, in my estimation, an importance far above the fluctuating influences of the times, I did not hesitate at an early day to give to it the whole of my humble influence. I have, in consequence, enjoyed the high honor of seeing it twice carried by a decided vote through this the popular branch of the National Legislature, and of missing only by a little the seal of the senatorial approbation. And still the measure stands as high in my regards as ever. I still see it as far-reaching and salutary in its influence, and worthy of the most earnest attention of the most eminent statesmanship. It is still a measure promising more than any other to impart strength to the State, by unfolding her natural resources, and by providing her with a numerous population, attached to her by the ties of gratitude—by a love for the soil which furnishes them with a subsistence and a home, and which is *their own*—a population which is interested, in the highest degree, in the preservation of our republican institutions; and whose virtues should be kept alive as the true vestal fires, which will preserve in its integrity the matchless fabric of American liberty for which our fathers fought.

It has been ascribed as the peculiar danger to the perpetuity of Democratic governments, the temptation to yield to measures which promise a present, but temporary benefit, to the neglect of those whose benefits, though ever so great and decided, are yet remote. The consequence is, a restless and excited career, terminating early in national ruin. The remedy is, to be wise in time; and so to shape, by legislation, the policy of the country, as that, while the external prosperity of the individual may be promoted, the best guarantees may be provided



for his advancement in intelligence, and his establishment in virtue. If the history of nations teaches anything at all, it is the emphatic lesson that Democratic institutions depend for their permanence less upon the intelligence than upon the *virtue* of the people. Hence the wisdom of those laws which tend to encourage such dispositions in the masses, and hence an argument, not inferior in strength to any, for the enactment of the homestead.

With the obstacles which, since its first introduction into this House as a distinctive measure, the homestead has encountered, and the struggles through which it has passed, we are all familiar. It is to this body that belongs the honor, which will perpetually endear them in the hearts of the people, of the initiative in recognising, on a basis the most decided and liberal, of the great principle of *cheap homes*.

A word or two as to what I consider will be the most important effects of the measure. One, the most obvious, and not the least important, will be the removal, in a great measure, of this subject of the public lands, which has been so long the fruit of bitter contention, from the halls of legislation, and the arena of politics. Let us pass this bill, and we shall prove that governments are not essentially selfish and exacting—treating the masses as subordinate to their rulers, and consulting much more the interests of favorites, of classes and corporations, than the rights of individuals, but that they are capable of rendering justice to all. Pass this bill, and you will strengthen the arm of the government, by creating a community of interest, and thus strengthening the ties which bind together the government and the citizen. Mr. Jefferson, in one of his letters to John Jay, remarked that “cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country, and wedded to its liberty and interests, by the most lasting bonds.”

While the form of our government secures equality of political rights, this measure will go far to secure equality of social condition; and we shall thus witness a reversal of the old system, by which, instead of exacting contributions from the citizen, the government assumes the truly paternal function of encouraging him by its bounty. Let us pass this bill, Mr. Speaker, and incalculable are the benefits which we shall thus confer, not only upon the present, but unborn generations. You will thus send rejoicing into the bosom of many a family where, before, the discouragements of life had stifled ambition and effort. You will carry joy to thousands of firesides, and gladden the hearts of myriads throughout the country. Under its benign operation, the unreclaimed wastes in the great basin of the Mississippi shall spring into a beauty and loveliness which shall be truly worthy of this golden age. There, upon the sea-like prairies, and far away upon the sources of the Yellowstone, the Columbia, the Arkansas, and the Colorado, and many a stream which now “hears no sound save its own dashing”—under the shadow of the Stony Mountains and the Sierra Nevada, the happy settler will, under the provisions of your munificent policy, teach the wilderness to bud and blossom as the rose. Under the hand of industry thus wisely fostered and encouraged, waving fields will enrich the landscape; lowing herds and the noise of the arts will enliven those now



inaccessible retreats; and still new settlers will rise up to avail themselves of this provision, and to bless you as its authors.

Under this provision of the homestead, in connexion with that in regard to the Pacific railroad, which I hope will be so extended as to reach the Pacific, and invite to our shores the trade of Asia, a chain of cities, like that which marked the course of the India trade in Asia and Europe, along the shores of the Mediterranean and the Adriatic, will stud the vast expanse between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans; and from the sources of the Saskatchewan, on our northern border, even unto the Isthmus, will be eventually gemmed with populous and flourishing communities. Hand in hand these two great measures should penetrate the wilderness. The forest will then fall before them, and the fruits of nature, springing from the seed deposited by the hand of industry, will everywhere burst the sod. Civilization will then prosecute unimpeded her stately march—bearing with her the virtues, the arts, the graces, and refinements of life.

By passing this bill you extend the market for manufactures, and press into further requisition the Briarean hands of commerce. The locomotive will achieve fresh conquests over time and space, and the steamboat will continue to find new waters still unbroken by its revolving paddles, and with which its tireless strength may contend. Our mercantile marine, multiplied in countless numbers under this genial policy, will groan under kindly burdens, and whiten all the ocean. The world will be our tributaries, and our resistless energies will engage us in a prosperous exchange with every people upon earth. There is literally no limit to our prosperity, as I believe, to be immensely promoted by the measure under consideration, if only true to ourselves, and to that matchless bond of union which holds us together. Let us by this measure temper, by the thousand healthful influences springing from agricultural pursuits, the luxurious excesses to which the colossal achievements of our commerce and manufactures are tending, and we may rest in confidence, that, under Providence, the restless and Titanic movements of the age will eventuate in the welfare of the human race.

With the establishment of this measure, I should feel that my career as a legislator had not been fruitless. On the contrary, I should be proud of the accomplishment of a measure recommended alike by wisdom, policy, and justice. I should covet no higher honor than to be remembered in connexion with legislation like this. I may say further, in view of resigning, with the close of the present Congress, my authority into the hands of my constituents, that I am satisfied that no subject has, within the period of my membership here, come under our deliberations, which, by its importance and beneficial character, was in any degree so well entitled to my labors.

Of that constituency to which I am about voluntarily to return, I must be indulged in a few words in conclusion. I must be allowed to express my proud sense of the honor which they have done me in twice making me their Representative upon this floor, as well as for that good will of which they have given me the most positive and distinguished testimonials. I am proud that, upon the spot which knew my infancy, and which has witnessed my struggles in the battle of life, I have been favored by the choice of a substantial, an intelligent, an industrious,



and eminently virtuous community, as their Representative in the management of public affairs. I am proud to represent here a district, which, in the noble State of which it forms a portion, owns inferiority to none. Others may be more populous, and more favored by commercial advantages, but none surpasses it in the wealth of its agricultural and mineral resources; in its capacity to sustain a great population; in picturesque beauty, and in the worthy character of its people. It was in this district, where noble mountains stoop their blue summits to fields of golden fertility and culture, and where forest-crowned hill and grassy valley are interspersed with delightful diversity, that the Father of his Country, after the disastrous field of Braddock, made among the first settlements upon the waters of the Youghiogheny. It was there on the banks of the Monongahela, near to the mountains through which its waters break their passage—a river than which no sweeter stream of more gentle or beauteous flow, threads its way to the ocean—that Gallatin found his chosen retreat, of all the States besides. Learning has found, too, in its bosom, a happy abode, and colleges of reputable fame, bearing the names of Washington, of Jefferson, of Madison, and of Greene, are sending forth continual rays of intellectual and moral light to irradiate and beautify the popular mind. The home of enterprise not less than of wealth and of moral excellence, her adventurous sons are found pursuing their useful and thrifty callings along the Ohio and all the rivers of the Mississippi valley, from the mountains to the Gulf of Mexico. To my cherished home in that lovely valley, I am now satisfied to resign myself, conscious that in the discharge of my public duties I have not swerved a tittle, whether it regards party obligations, the interests of my constituents, or the welfare of my country.



